

## [Interview with Vito Cacciola #6]

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By Merton R. Lovett

"As well as remembered"

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(from memory)

"Hello, Mr. Lovett ..... Dis my brudder Peter. He's worka for Connolly Brothers. In de World War he's de Cap/ Coporal in de Italian Army." Peter's Story

"Sure, Mr. Lovett, I fighta de Austrians. I leava my job in America and fighta four years. For eighteen months I was de prisoner in Germany.

"I was capture one time with eighty thousand more Italians.

"Sure the Italians was gooda fighters. But in 1917 de Russians go bust. All de Austrians what was fighting in Galacia marcha to Italy. Besides, de was mucha Germans and a million bigga cannons.

"We was at Capretto. De Austrians was on two sides, de Germans on one. Backa us was de river.

"De cannon and de airplane smasha de bridges. Den we have no placa to go. Our army was caught like de rat in de trap.

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"Alla day de Airplanes fly in de sky like hawks. Nighta and day de big guns smasho de houses and killa de Italians.

"Sure. Sure, I was frighten. All de soldiers, de whole platoon, crowda in de hole, — de dugout. But whatsa good is that? If a big bomb falla in de hole, everybody gets smasha up. Thousands of Italians get kill-ed or wound-ed.

"And alla time we was hungry. De food he was scarce. And where we get more? Acrossa de river was much to eat, but no one could getta there. My pal and I was lucky. In de dark we taka de stretcher and carry de wounded mens to de hospital. De dead mens we leava to more soldiers to bury if they coulda. My pal, his name wasa Santo, say, 'Dese men are dead, dey cannot eata. De are friends of ours. Ifa de was able, de would shara dere food with us. If we are hungry dey be glad to giva us some chocolate, or beans or bread.'

"Yes, dats de way it go, till de General he surrender.

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"No, he has no chance. De army cannot go one way for de enemy is too many. We cannot go back, retreat, for de bridges are smash-ed.

"I wasa captured by de Germans. One night our Captain was wounded, shot in de belly. We taka him to a little house and make for him a bed. We lighta de candle and was trya to make him easy when de Germans come.

"De German soldiers shaka de boyonets at us. De German officer shouta. He say in de German, 'Getta out.' Marcha! Marcha!' I saya, 'My captain cannot march. He's a wounded.' But the Germans no understand de English or Italian. Den I showa him my Captain's wound. And de officer he yella, 'Eim! Swei! Du!' Den he pointa to de stretcher. So we take de wounded Captain and leava dere. Bye and bye we leava him in a chiesa, church, which is lika hospital.

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"De German prison mucha far. For eight days and seven nights we walka.

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"It was cold. Three days it rain-ed. We hava nothing to eat.

"Sure, de Germans hava nothing to give us. De has only just enough to eat for themselves.

"In our party there was 6,000 captive Italians. Our guns and our knives was all gone. We has orders to marcha and keep a marcha.

"Dey was not so many German guards. Sometimes I no see any. Sometimes dere was a few and eacha had a gun with a bigga bayonet.

"In my bag was some beans. De next night we was walka through de forest. It raina. I tella my pal, let us stop and cooka some beans. He say, 'I am hungry enough to eata de shoe, if I hava de shoe.'

"So we stoppa and maka de fire. First I putta side by side some stones. I putta de beans in pan and putta it on de fire. In little while we eata de beans. De was not halfa cooked. But we was afraid. Perhaps de German officer see our fire. Perhaps de hungry Italians want beans too. So we stuffs dem in our mouths with our 5 hands. Then we taka our blanket and try to sleepa. Pretty soon de German soldier poka us wid de gun and we marcha some more.

"De next night we pass a village. I see a white horse. No one own-ed him. He wasa old and all bones. I runa and catch him. My feet was sore. Some times when I walka I maka track of blood. But on de horse's back I getta rested for a time.

"Den we come from Mountains, before sunrise, and dere was houses and Germans by side of de road. I rida near de German officer. I wonder what he do. When he seea me, he

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jumpa like he see de ghost. He shouta, 'Gefungan! Gefungan!' Then he calla de soldiers wid bayonets. So I say to myself, 'Peter, you rida no more. Dis horse going to get German master.

"With dere bayonets de poke me. Den de pusha me in de house. De officer he yella at me in German. So I talka to him in English. Sure, he could talka English. He's liva long time in England. He aska me where I learn talk English, so I tell him Boston. He say he 6 wanta ask me some questions about de Italian army. He say if I tella him much it make me no harm. I answer that it sure won't make me much good. Then I tella him some what I know; but de German say he know more than I about de army.

"De German officers is what you calla very stiff. Yes, very harsh. Always full of de business and no maka friends. But dis German he ask me, was I hungry? I say, I was more hungry as a wolf. Den be giva me some bread and sausage and tea.

"In one town in Austria, de 6,000 prisoners was all camp in a field. It was dark, but some fires are there. Nothing had we eaten all day. Now de Germans was going to giva us some soup from de turnip and cabbage. A bigga German officer calls us to attention. Den, he speaka, 'I want sixteen men of good will to help in de kitchen. Will sucha volunteer? Alla of us rush him in order to volunteer. Everybody wanta work in de kitchen. De officer was most tramp-ed under. But I wasa pick-ed to worka.

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"De cookhouse hada two rooms. One hada de fires. De udder was dark and wasa store room. Quick I runna in de store room. Lika a hound do I smella for food.

"What I find? I finda me a pail full of cold potatoes and de sour Kraut. Like a flash I runa out de back door. In de dark, behind de house, I eat lika pig. Now I coulda not eat so much in three days.

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"When I no could eat any more, I puta de rest insida my shirt. Den I go finda my pal Santo. I say to him, 'Santo, are you a hungry?' He answer, 'You G— D— Fool; whata you think?' I say, 'I gotta someting to eat.' He say, 'Don't kidda me. It maka me mad with you. Where you get someting eat?'

"Den I tell him and we hida behind bush and he eata de potata and sour kraut what I has got left. Den he say, 'If de Germans find out they killa you.' I know that. They shoota me sure. But dey was such a bigga number of Italians that they no finda out.

"Bye and bye we coma to Germany. I remember one night we was campin' in a bigga park, like de common in Boston. All around was fine houses. De German officers 8 make good times in de houses. De poor Italians sleep on de ground.

"I walk around. De guards no watch us close. I see a bigga house bright wid lights. A German orderly come out of de door and leava it open. I steala in. I look and in de big room, de German officers were playing at cards. They drinka de beer. De sing and hava much fun.

"I look in anodder room. It was dark. I hunta for food. I no finda any but de was much cigarettes in de big box. I taka; what you call it, 24 packages? Yes, de cartoon. De was fine cigarettes what de officers smoka.

"De was some mattresses or beds pile in de room. I taka one too and sneaka out. I wasa desperat-ed. I no care now if I get kill-ed.

"In de park I finda dark place and sleepa on de mattress. Before daylight I getta up an leava from there. When I finda my friend Santo I giva him half of de 9 cigarettes. He say de are fina, as he ever smoke, but he say too, 'You are crazy in de head Peter. Some day you getta shot.'

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“De next day we all coma to de prison. We was shava all aver, all de hair on de head, de leg, everywhere. We was giva bath.

“Why, to killa de louse.

“I must go now, Mr. Lovett. Soma day I tell you about de prison if you lika me to.”